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ABSTRACT

Professionalism and professionalization are two issues important to the field of counseling. A basic definition of a profession is necessary in order to understand the role of counseling as a profession. One theory on the development of professions in the western world begins with the priest as the prototypical professional. Professions then secularized, differentiated, liberalized, and rationalized. The rise of technique and the emergence of new professions encouraged institutional growth and an increased development of professionalism. Counseling developed as a means by which people could help each other to meet the challenges of the future. Various disciplines have contributed to the field of counseling, including psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, education, economics, and philosophy. Counseling began with the vocational guidance movement. The mental health movement merged with earlier developments in counseling to form the present concept of counseling. Counseling as a profession can be analyzed using the six characteristics of American professions, as adapted from Wilensky's (1964) study: (1) strong level of commitment; (2) long and disciplined education process; (3) unique body of knowleldge and skill; (4) discretionary authority and judgment; (5) active and cohesive professional organization; and (6) acknowledged social worth and contribution. Despite its growth, counseling must maintain and increase its level of professionalization in order to become a fully recognized profession. (ABL)

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Counseling: Issues of Professionalism and Professionalization

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COUNSELING: PROFESSIONALISM AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

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Abstract

How many counselors view themselves as professionals? The answer to this question led to this research on counseling as a profession. This paper addresses the issues of professionalism and professionalization as they relate to counseling. An examination of the origin of professions is given, which serves as the basis for research on professionalism and professionalization. Another section of this paper is devoted to the history of counseling, to better understand its growth as a profession. Counseling will be analyzed using the six characteristics of American professions, as adapted from Wilensky's (1964) study. The six characteristics are: (a) strong level of commitment, (b) long and disciplined education process, (c) unique body of knowledge and skill, (d) discretionary authority and judgment, (e) active and cohesive professional organization, and (f) acknowledged social worth and contribution. This paper emphasizes how counseling has become more professionalized. Despite its growth, counseling must maintain and increase its level of professionalization in order to become a fully recognized profession.

Counseling: Issues of Professionalism and Professionalization

What process does a professional go through in order to seek professional status? As one author states, it is impossible to discuss the counselor as a professional without considering the personal qualities that influence the kind of professional he or she becomes (G. Corey, M.S. Corey, & Callahan, 1979). For counselors, as well as other professionals in the helping field, one's values, beliefs, personal attributes, life experiences, and way of life are intrinsically related to the way he or she functions as a professional. Counselors should be aware that their personal needs and motivations can significantly influence the counseling relationship. They should also know that proper self-evaluation is important for anyone who decides to embark on a career in this field.

There are two general frames of reference for professionalization; self-regulation and autonomy. Wilensky (1964) states that the degree of professionalization is measured not just by the degree of success in the claim to exclusive technical competence, but also by the degree of adherence to the service ideal and its supporting norms of professional conduct (p. 141). Counseling has grown from its early beginnings in American education, still it can improve upon its level of professionalism.

This paper attempts to address the issues of professionalism and professionalization as they relate to counseling. Counseling as a profession will be analyzed according to the characteristics of American professions, outlined by Wilensky (1964). A basic definition of a profession is necessary to understand the role of counseling as a profession.

Definition of a Profession

Argyris and Schon (1981) state that professions as such originated in religion; what started as a faith-oriented philosophy eventually turned into an ideological philosophy. Development of professions in the western world formed like this:

- the priest was the prototypical professional
- the professions secularized and differentiated
- the professions liberalized and rationalized, and
- the rise of technique, which was proliferation of discrete bodies of professional expertise and technique as bases for professional specialties (p. 147)

The resulting emergence of new professions, and increasingly sophisticated skills, encouraged institutional growth, which resulted in an increased development of professionalism.

Professionalism as we know it began with the medical professions during the early 1700s. Many of the current professions such as law, accounting, engineering, and college teaching, have emerged since the 18th century. Counseling as a profession emerged as a result of a specific societal need. According to Tyler (1961), the instability generated by the rapid changes occurring in our way of life led to the development of counseling as a profession.

Hayward (1974) discussed the need for professionalism in society. His many arguments support the growth of the emerging professions. He stated that professionalism is our link to the past, by way of social heredity. Social heredity involves tradition passing down through various forms of communication, which helps to maintain the stable structure of civilization. Professionalism is the chief linking agent to the past, and one must acquire a certain amount of knowledge in order to enter a profession. Professionalism has provided for the need to specialize. Hayward believed that all affairs of life demand specialist training at some point and time. An example of specialization is the division of labor, which is so prevalent in the workforce. A final point of this argument suggests that professionalism meets the needs of individuals. Because of one's ability to specialize and perform a task well, professionalism provided the individual

with more self-esteem. Rather than having pride in belonging to a privileged profession, professionalism allowed individuals to have pride in their own work.

Hayward's (1974) arguments point out the difficulties that are constantly encountered by an emerging group of professions. His and the other definitions of a profession complicate an accurate definition of "a real profession."

A more recent view of professionalism was proposed by Schein (1972). He saw the problem in defining professionalism as a result of society's attempt to give precision to a social or occupational role. According to Schein, professions vary based on the individual professional setting. Everyone has a different perception of what constitutes a profession, and as such, the concept of the professional cannot be defined by any single criterion.

This short history of the definition of professions, the need for professionalism, and the current status of professionalism, provides a framework for a discussion of the professionalism and professionalization of counseling.

History of Counseling

Counseling developed as a means by which people could help each other to meet the challenges of the future (Tyler, 1961). This meant that those who performed tasks as counselors would assist individuals in making appropriate

choices. Much of the impetus for counseling resulted from the American educational system, particularly after the Industrial Revolution. Before the industrialization period, most Americans resided in small towns where religion and family played key roles in the socialization process. Once families became more mobile, changes began to take place in both homes and schools. Tyler (1961) believes that it was a combination of diversity in society along with democratic ideals and attitudes that made counseling necessary. These changes in the American way of life began to dispel the old certainties that existed. Religion became less influential in many homes and counseling began to fulfill the needs that religion once met.

Counseling originated from related but separate fields, and as a result, it has an interdisciplinary background. Various disciplines have contributed to the field of counseling. According to Glanz (Hansen Stevin & Warner, 1982), counseling is an applied science composed of elements from psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, education, economics, and philosophy.

The concept of counseling evolved through several stages of historical development beginning with the vocational guidance movement. Frank Parsons (1967) is said to be the founder of the original form of counseling. This form involved matching an individual with an appropriate

occupation, which was outlined in his book, Choosing a Vocation. The task of the vocational counselor was to make available to a client dependable information about the characteristics of different occupations, and the client's own talents and limitations (Tyler, 1961, pp. 9-10).

The basic concept of gathering data about an individual and selected occupations, and then matching the two led to more technology in counseling. Scientific methods for studying an occupation resulted in the evaluation of individuals in quantitative terms. World War I saw the first use of IQ tests, when thousands of enlisted men were used as subjects for various testing procedures. This use of psychological tests in counseling increased the importance of counselor education. What resulted were increased standards of training for vocational counselors, which led to more specialization.

Although the World War I period was a positive one in regard to the study of human behavior, it also fostered restrictions on the future development of counseling. Counseling was viewed for some time as an event that occurred once or twice before entering the world of work, and it began to emerge as a vocationally oriented profession. Such limitations in orientation have hampered the perception of counseling as a total profession.

Although Brewer (1942) initiated the concept that education should provide guidance for young people, Jesse Davis (1914) was instrumental in developing the concept of educational guidance. This new development broadened the scope of counseling to include not just occupational information, but concern for the total human being. The major disadvantage in this new approach was that counseling became synonymous with teaching, and counseling was difficult to define in a clear, professional sense.

The introduction of the mental health movement and its theories merged with the previous developments in counseling to help form our present concept of counseling. In his book, The Mind That Found Itself, Clifford Beers (1952) analyzed the problem of mental illness in the United States. Beers viewed mental illness as an individual experience and as a social problem. During this same period, psychoanalysis emerged as a method of treatment for the emotionally disabled and as another way to view human motivation and behavior. Just as World War I had convinced counselors and psychologists that mental abilities were measurable, World War II convinced them that emotional difficulties were curable (Tyler, 1961). This latest development in counseling has promoted greater expansion in psychiatry and clinical psychology. What those in the field of mental health and vocational guidance called counseling,

those in the more clinical settings referred to as therapy. Both groups regarded counseling as a means of helping people to adjust to themselves and society (Hansen, Stevin, & Warner, 1982). One of the disadvantages of this perspective was the resultant focus on crisis counseling and the belief that individuals should conform to society.

A response to this emphasis led to the emergence of developmental counseling. The major aspect of this specialization was a concentration on developmental tasks. Havighurst (1953) defined a developmental task as one "which arises at or about a certain period in the life of an individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by society, and difficulty with later tasks" (p. 2). Whereas the phase before it dealt with crisis intervention, developmental counseling focused on the developmental maturity of individuals. Part of this approach included emphasis on counseling as an aid in decision making.

During the 1960s, two sometimes conflicting emphases developed in counseling. The National Defense Education Act in 1958 increased the interest in the sciences. At the same time, counseling was to assist in the social reconstruction

of society. This suggested that a counselor's role was related to his early function--serving the social needs of the nation.

The 1970s brought about the need for a new kind of counselor. More counselors worked in mental health settings, where they provided services to a wide range of clients. Many of these new settings involved working with alcoholics, substance abusers, and the physically and mentally disabled. Due to this new need in counseling, more in-depth counselor training was instituted, and it improved the perception of counseling as a profession. This evolving definition of counseling has included additions rather than substitutions, and has emphasized professional growth in counseling.

One of the difficulties in defining counseling as a profession refers to the attempt to differentiate counseling from psychotherapy. According to Tyler (1961), therapy is generally considered to involve a personality change of some sort. Counseling is a helping process which aims to enable a person to utilize the available resources he or she now has for coping with life (Tyler, 1961). Today, counseling and psychotherapy are generally used interchangeably and both offer clients a continuum of services.

Based on this history of counseling, it is now appropriate to use Wilensky's (1964) characteristics of professions to compare counseling as a profession.

Characteristics of Counseling as a Profession

Strong Level of Commitment

Counselors, like so many other professionals who directly impact on the lives of others, tend to burn out quickly. Because the work demands are so high and the economic rewards so low, many counselors leave the profession. Still, counselors are performing a task that is greatly needed in society. Depending on what area of counseling we discuss, the individual's level of commitment varies. For example, most counseling psychologists work in various treatment settings including private practice. Such diversity in work settings has limited full-time commitment to the profession. The current economic situation in the United States has seen the displacement of many counselors. Many mental health centers, along with the other programs where counseling professionals work, have lost funding or have closed their doors due to certification and licensure regulations. Some counselors who worked in these institutions have moved to other settings or have changed professions.

In order for counselors to maintain a strong level of commitment to their profession, economic stability must be achieved. Unlike the more established professions such as medicine and law, counselors must struggle to identify themselves. Also, because the term counseling has been used so freely, just about anyone can start a private practice and perform counseling tasks. MacLennan (1982) found that paraprofessionals could readily serve the needs of clients in place of professional counselors. These practices have negatively affected counseling as a profession. As a result, people see counseling as a marginal profession, convenient to use at one time and inappropriate at other times.

Counseling is similar to teaching, in that it does not allow for the continued development of strong individual bonds with clients. Because clients are supposed to receive counseling for a short time period, counselors must continuously seek out new clients. Due to this difficulty in maintaining adequate numbers of clients and low financial rewards, counselors are unable to commit themselves full time to the profession.

Long and Disciplined Educational Process

The majority of professionals who work in the counseling field have had lengthy educational training. The minimum requirement for counselors is a graduate degree in

counseling psychology, counseling, or guidance and counseling. This involves at least one year of study beyond the bachelor's degree. Counselors receive their training in a variety of settings. Some counselors study in a university psychology department, some study in an education department, while still others are trained in a guidance and counseling program.

Fretz and Mills (1980) made a distinction between the term psychologist and counselor which could be helpful in determining the educational process of counselors. A "Professional Psychologist," and its variations such as "Clinical Psychologist," "Counseling Psychologist," "School Psychologist," and "Industrial Psychologist" are reserved for those who have completed a doctoral training program in psychology in a university, college, or professional school of psychology that is APA or regionally accredited. "Counselor" refers to those master's or doctoral level persons trained in counselor education or other counselor training programs. As for the individuals with master's degrees who are trained in psychology, the term "master's-level psychologist" can be used (Fretz & Mills, 1980).

As qualifications for psychologists have become more restrictive, many individuals and organizations have sought licensing and certification as counselors. Given the

breadth of the counseling profession, it seems appropriate for individuals of diverse training and experience to seek credentialing. Credentialing and licensing are vehicles used for professionalization. Professional counseling has not defined itself as a profession with recognized and measurable competencies. Therefore, efforts in the licensure and certification areas are an attempt to rectify this situation (Messina, 1979).

During the late 1970s, there was great debate over the issue of licensure versus certification. Two professional organizations, the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Association for Counseling and Development (AACD) (formerly the American Personnel and Guidance Association), differ in their definitions of licensure and certification. The APA's definition of licensure refers to laws that regulate the use of the title and defines activities that constitute the practice of a particular profession. The APA position for certification is that it regulates and limits the use of a title, such as psychologist, but not the scope of practice. Certification can be awarded by fulfilling state requirements, or it can be granted by nonstatutory associations or agencies (Fretz & Mills, 1980, p. 7). According to the AACD, licensure is the statutory process by which an agency of government, usually of a state, grants permission to a person meeting

predetermined qualifications to engage in a given occupation and/or to use a particular title and to perform specified functions. Certification by AACD standards is the nonstatutory process by which an agency or association grants recognition to an individual for having met certain predetermined professional qualifications (Fretz & Mills, 1980, p. 7). Those who favored licensure included individuals who were senior members of the profession. Obtaining a license to counsel maintained that a certain level of educational training had been met. But, what about those individuals who do not have the traditional academic training?

There are those individuals who have acquired the skills necessary to meet maximum standards of competency. Proponents of certification argue that licensure has been a roadblock for such individuals. Certification supporters argue that their procedure provides evidence of a level of competence defined by the profession as a national standard (Messina, 1979). Certification is seen as a more flexible credentialing process than licensure. It recognizes both the conventionally and non-conventionally trained individual. In January 1982, the Board of Professional Counselors was established by the American Mental Health Counselors Association. The establishment of this board has led the way for the professionalization of counseling. The

emphasis on counseling certification appears to fulfill the educational standards which characterize an American profession.

Unique Body of Knowledge and Skill

The evolution of counseling demonstrates its interdisciplinary background, and its association with the American educational system. When individuals with different backgrounds came together in educational institutions, counselors provided help in dealing with the difficulties that they encountered. The role of the counseling professional became more identifiable as a result the growing need for counseling in society. A professional counselor, as defined by the Pepinskys (1954), had to have an organized body of knowledge, had to undergo scarification rites, and needed to be identified with a professional group.

A dilemma remained in the counseling profession, even with its new role in society. The problem was similar to that in the other helping professions--the difficulty of being both practitioner and scientist (H.B. Pepinsky & P.N. Pepinsky, 1954). The counselor can function in ways that are scientifically meaningful and socially useful. A counselor functions as a scientist and practitioner when there is (a) a continuous use throughout the counseling

process of observation and inference, and (b) the assessment of behavior changes in a client during and after counseling (H.B. Pepinsky & P.N. Pepinsky, 1954, pp. 13-14).

Since the field of counseling covers many areas of specilization, individuals are trained accordingly. Counseling involves the study of psychology, and as a result of the counselor's study of human behavior, he becomes an expert in this field. Again, psychology is an area that other professionals study during their training (e.g., ministers, psychiatrists). According to Hollis (1983), there has been an increase in knowledge, theory, and technique for counseling specialization. The term counseling is now used with one or more other words that specify the type of counseling used. These recent developments evidence counseling's progress toward professionalism.

Discretionary Authority and Judgement

Discretionary authority and judgement vary according to an individual counselor's particular work setting and educational training. Clients are referred to counselors who are employed in the various mental health and social service agencies. For those individuals who are in private practice, they are allowed to select their clients. As more problems arise in society, more forms of counseling seem to appear. Just about every occupational setting has a need

for counseling. One of the current major problems involves the exclusion of master's and doctoral trained counselors from the mental health field. As with so many things in professional life, economics plays a key role in excluding counselors in the mental health setting. Asher (1979) states that the profession has become increasingly preoccupied with pleasing the insurance industry. Since more individuals are covered by health insurance plans, social service agencies seek counselors who have the appropriate credentials so that their agencies can receive reimbursement.

Counseling professionals must have doctoral degrees in psychology, have to have had the required internship according to the American Psychological Association in order to be eligible to provide reimbursable services. On the other hand, social workers with master's degrees are considered qualified by insurance companies and can receive such payments. Consequently, counselors with master's and doctoral degrees have been replaced by this "cheaper labor." The economy dictates more and more the level of authority that the field of counseling holds, and will directly affect the counseling profession in the future.

Active and Cohesive Professional Organization

Specialized organizations in the counseling field include the American Psychological Association and the American Association for Counseling and Development. These two organizations define the role of specific counseling professions and set ethical guidelines for members. The greatest role of professional counseling organizations is in the area of licensing and certification. As mentioned earlier, the formation of the Board of Professional Counselors and the establishment of procedures for certification of counselors have been major steps toward the full professionalization of counseling.

The general guidelines offered by most professional organizations allow the practitioner flexibility, and they usually represent minimal standards of ethical conduct (Corey, et al., 1979). Since ethical standards are becoming increasingly significant, it is necessary to discuss some concerns in the area of counseling. Some ethical issues that professional counseling organizations encounter are:

1. The ethical responsibilities of therapists. The counselor's primary responsibility is to the client. Counselors also have responsibilities to the client's family, the agency they work for, the agency that referred the client, society, the profession, and themselves.

2. Ethical aspects of therapist competence. Since ethical codes in most professions set very general guidelines with respect to competence, one is never sure of a professional's skill. Corey (1974) claims that even licenses and certification are no more a guarantee of competence than degrees. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each professional organization to monitor those individuals who are members of their organizations. Such monitoring will give the public some basis in choosing a particular counseling speciality (e.g., psychotherapist, psychologist).

3. Confidentiality, privileged communication and privacy. Confidentiality is a very important criterion as far as ethics are concerned. Counseling professionals should develop a sense of professional ethics that they can draw upon in determining when the confidentiality of the helping relationship should be broken (Corey, 1979).

The role of the various professional counseling organizations fluctuate. These organizations are continuously upgraded in order to fulfill the needs of their members.

Acknowledged Social Worth and Contribution

The counseling profession as a whole has yet to reach a high level of social worth, even though counseling emerged as a result of social needs. Counselors in specific areas of specialization (e.g., clinical psychologists, rehabilitation counselors) have attained a certain level of social worth. According to recent studies, society is beginning to acknowledge counseling's contribution. Hollis (1983) has published information on counselor preparation

programs in the United States since 1970. This increased demand for counselor preparation programs shows that the public is accepting the importance of counseling as a contributor to positive mental health. As more and more people seek professional counseling, the profession should grow in terms of its social worth and its contribution to society.

Conclusions

This paper attempted to define counseling as a profession. The most distinctive criterion of a profession is the obligation to declare and abide by standards of excellence in the preparation and continued performance of its members. All established professions advance through certain stages of development, and the counseling profession is no exception. The following is an example of a profession's developmental stages.

1. Establishment and performance of a needed service.
2. Development of appropriate programs of preparation.
3. Growth in numbers of workers in the speciality.
4. Recognition of unevenness in preparation and certification.
5. Increasing demand and public expectation for quality in the service performed.
6. Recognition of ethical problems.

7. Increasing awareness by the emerging profession of the need to examine critically the qualifications and performance of its members.

8. Development of standards as guidelines for continuous professional development and strength in meeting its responsible role. (American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1956, p. i)

The counseling profession is going through these developmental stages, and continues to increase its level of professionalism and professionalization. It is my belief that in order for counseling to accomplish more professionalism it must strive for quality--quality in educational preparation, and quality in standards for state certification, which guarantees professional competence.

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